

Theology vol 127
T H E
PRINCIPLES *k*

O F A N
OCCASIONAL CONFORMIST,
Stated and Defended.

W I T H
A P R E F A C E in Answer to
Dr. SHERLOCK's Reflections on
OCCASIONAL CONFORMITY, in his
*Vindication of the Corporation and Test
Acts.*



L O N D O N,
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THE

PRINTING

OF

ORIGINAL

MANUSCRIPTS



AND

THE



T H E P R E F A C E.



*THE following Paper, which has lain by for some Time, is now made Publick, only upon Occasion of the heavy Imputations laid by the Reverend Dean of Chichester in his last Performance *, upon the Practice defended in it. He is so much a Stranger, or affects to appear so, to the Principles and the Practice of many Dissenters in the Matter of Occasional-Conformity, that it seems necessary to set him right about them. If he had been better acquainted with their History, he would not have begun that Part of his Argument with calling it † The Doctrine of Occasional-Conformity for Places: Or affirmed, That this * broke in upon the Evidence (designed to be given by receiving*

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* Vindication of the Corpor. and Test-Acts. † p. 17.

* Ibid.

*the Sacrament according to the Church of England,) just as Equivocation and mental Reservation broke in upon the Evidence of an Oath:— That it was found by * Experience, (after the Settlement of the Corporation and Test-Acts,) that the Law was evaded by this Practice:— That it was an open Affront to the Law of the Country: — That those who plead for the Repeal of the Occasional-Bill only, do in effect declare, That all Men may be at Liberty to give the Proof required by the Law of their Adherence to the Established Church, and yet be at Liberty not to adhere to it.*

HERE are Three very invidious Charges laid upon the Practice of Occasional-Conformity: That it had its Rise from a Design to evade the Corporation and Test-Acts: That it was an Abuse, not foreseen by the Legislature, when those Acts were made; and which therefore, when they were better instructed by Experience, they took Care to prevent. And, that it was a Practice as destructive to that Use of the Sacrament, which was intended by those Laws, as the Doctrine of Equivocation and mental Reservation is to the Use of Oaths.

THE

* *Ibid.* † p. 18,

The PREFACE.

V

THE first *Accusation*, is so fully answer'd in the following *Treatise*, that it may be hoped, that *Clamour* will be silenc'd, when it appears to have been the *Practice* and avow'd *Principle* of many *Learned Nonconformists* of all *Sorts*, before those *Laws* had a *Being*, and without an *Eye* to *Places*. The *Learned Dean* will be better pleas'd to receive that *Information* from the late *Excellent Bishop* of that *See* where he is now dignify'd, than from me. If he will look into *Bishop Stillingfleet's* *Mischief* of *Separation*, he will find more to the same *Purpose*. And I might add, how much the late *Arch-Bishop Sharp*, profess'd himself to be edify'd, when he was *Minister* of *St. Giles's* in the *Fields*, by seeing *Mr. Read* come to receive the *Sacrament* from him, tho' he kept up a *Dissenting Conventicle* at the same *Time*.

THE second *Reflection* the *Dean* insinuates, is, * That this *Practice* was an *Abuse*, not foreseen by the *Legislature*, when those *Acts* were made; and which therefore they took *Care* to prevent, when *Experience* had made them sensible of it. Whereas they could hardly fail to be aware, that many *Dissenters* would still be capable of *Places* in *Consistency* with their known *Principles*, notwithstanding that *Test*. And therefore had they design'd to exclude such, they

* *Ibid.* 18.

they would have carry'd their Test farther : At least, when they had found some Dissenters, as the Doctor calls it, evading the Corporation-Act by this Method, in a Course of many Years Experience, they would not have made the same Criterion for Places to stand again in the Test-Act, without any Provision against this suppos'd Evasion of their Design. The Truth is, The first Contrivers of the Occasional-Bill, had a much more uncharitable View in it for dividing Protestants, than the Framers of the two other Bills. In the Corporation-Act, it appears to me from the Words of the Act, and the Circumstances of the Time, that the Legislature intended rather to include, than exclude the more moderate Party, who could upon their Sentiments conform occasionally. The Men of those Principles had generally concurr'd in the Restoration ; and, in deed, been the main Instruments in bringing it about ; so that we can have no Reason to think, that the Government esteem'd them dangerous, or among the evil Spirits, who were still Working against it, as the Preamble of the Act recites, since they had done the most towards its Settlement. And I would desire leave to ask the Learned Dean this one Question, How an Act requiring Persons in Offices to receive the Sacrament according to the Rites of the Church of England, made in 1661, could be intended to exclude Presbyterians

terians, when so many of their Ministers continu'd still in Possession of the publick Churches till 1662? Would it not at that Time have been a sufficient Qualification to receive the Sacrament in their Parish-Church, tho' it should have been from no conformable Minister? When the Test-Act was form'd, 'tis well known the Protestant Dissenters stood upon good Terms with the chief Promoters of it: And I will add from Bishop Burnet, * Was obtain'd, in some Measure, by their Assistance, and therefore it would be hard to turn it against them.

BUT the third is still the blackest Imputation, That the Doctrine of Occasional-Conformity broke in upon the Evidence, (which the Corporation and Test-Acts intended should be given by Peoples receiving the Sacrament in the Church of England before their Admission to Offices,) just as the Doctrine of Equivocation and mental Reservation broke in upon the Evidence of an Oath. This must pass for a vile Slander, unless this Supposition be true, That receiving the Sacrament according to the Usage of the Church of England, is an Evidence of Communion with it, exclusive of any other Church, with which the Occasional

* Burnet's Speech in the House of Lords, on the Occasional Bill. 4to. 1710. p. 17.

sional Conformist has Communion also, *The Doctrine of Equivocation and mental Reservation, destroys the Credit of an Oath; because it gives Men a Salvo for testifying or promising something quite different from what the Letter of their Oath imports. Now there can be no Foundation for pretending, that Occasional-Conformity is a Parallel to this, unless it carries in it something contradictory to the Language of my communicating with the Church of England. The Reverend Doctor has not so fully spoke out in this Matter, as One might expect, since the whole of his Charge against Occasional-Conformity, depends upon it. I will lay together the Sum of what he says upon this Head, and then make a few Strictures upon it. He says, That * the Intention of the Corporation and Test-Act, was to keep the Nonconformists of all Sorts out of Offices.—— † That Places of Power and Trust should be in the Hands of such only as were well-affected to the Ecclesiastical Constitution.—— That * receiving the Sacrament according to the Usage of the Church of England, was intended as a Proof of a Man's being so affected, and even of his approving the Ecclesiastical Constitution of this Kingdom.—— That this Proof seem'd*
to

* Ibid. Page 5. † Ib. p. 6. * Ibid. Page 7, 8.

to be chosen, because the Dissenters had as strong Prejudices against the Usage of the Church in the Celebration of the Sacrament, as against any other Usage of it whatever. *And therefore, that it was reasonably presum'd, that no Dissenter of any Sort, would easily be led to such an Act of Insincerity, as receiving the Sacrament in a Manner condemn'd by himself. In the next Page † he adds, That it was design'd as a Proof of this Qualification for an Office, That the Person is well-affected to the Ecclesiastical State and Constitution of these Realms. In Proof of it, he refers to some †† Acts in King James Ist's Time against Popish Recusants. And immediately before he enters upon the Case of Occasional-Conformity, he says, *** Men are not suppos'd to be of one Church, and communicate with another. And confirms this from my Lord of Bangor's urging it as a Proof that Mr. Pillionere is no longer a Jesuit, that he has often received the Sacrament with the Church of England. Upon this Presumption, the Dean goes on, the Corporation and Test-Acts, are founded; they require the Evidence of a Man's receiving the Sacrament according to the Usage of the Church of England, only to prove that he is a Member*

[†] Ibid. p. 9.

^{††} Ibid. p. 10, 11.

^{***} p. 16, 17.

ber of that Church; or, as he expresses it in the next Sentence, of his being in the Communion of that Church, in which he receives.

UPON all this, I desire to make a few Observations.

I. I FREELY grant, That receiving the Sacrament with any Church, is an Evidence of the Person's being in Communion with it. That is, that he esteems it a true Church of CHRIST; and the Ordinances, in which he joins with it, to be Christian Ordinances; and that he does not believe any Thing absolutely unlawful in that Part in which he joins. But it is no Proof, that he judges every Thing in the Usage of that Church, even about the Administration of the Sacrament itself, preferable to the Usages of other Churches, as is shewn in the following Treatise. Much less is it a Proof, that he approves of every Thing else in the Constitution or Worship of that Church. For which, the Dean will give me leave to produce a much better Authority than my own, that of Bishop Burnet in the free Conference between the Lords and Commons about the Occasional-Bill in 1702. Nor is it a certain Inference, (says his Lordship) that because a Man receives the Sacrament in the Church, he can therefore conform in every other Particular: The Office of the Communion, is certainly

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ly one of the brightest and best compos'd of any that ever was in the Church of GOD. The little Exceptions that lay to the Posture, were so fully clear'd by the *Rubrick*, that is added, that it is indeed a Wonder how any Person should except to any Thing in the whole Office. But it does not necessarily follow, that therefore every Man, who is satisfy'd with this, should be likewise satisfy'd with every other Part of Conformity. *I have the rather recited this, as an Evidence how different his Lordship's Opinion was from the Dean's, that the Legislature chose this Test of the Sacrament rather than any other,* because the Dissenters had as strong Prejudices against the Usage of the Church in the Celebration of the Sacrament as against any other Usage of it whatever. 'Tis true, many of them cannot be satisfy'd of the Lawfulness of this, tho', I believe, few of them think it the strongest Objection against Conformity. But many others are well known to be satisfy'd of the Lawfulness of this Part of Conformity. And therefore it must be taken for an injurious Reflection, That it was reasonable presum'd, that no Dissenter, of any Sort, would easily be led to such an Act of Insincerity, as receiving the Sacrament in a Manner condemn'd by himself. *It will not excuse the Dean, that he charges the*

Insincerity only upon such as receive the Sacrament in a Manner condemn'd by themselves ; since he confounds Dissenters of all Sorts in this Charge, when he could not but know, that some Dissenters at all Times have declar'd their Belief of the Lawfulness of Communion with the Church of England.

2. I WOULD observe, that no Papists, upon the Principles of his Church could accept of an Office upon this Test, without gross Prevarication and mental Reservation. He cannot so much as once communicate with the Church of England, or any other Protestant Church, without disowning the fundamental Principle of his own most Uncatholick one, that there is no other Visible Church of Christ, but the Church of Rome, and such as live in obedience to it. This Test therefore, of communicating with the Church of England, might justly be construed in the Case of Popish Recusants as an Evidence of their intire Renunciation of Popery, when they would communicate with another Church which was absolutely disowned to be a Church of Christ by That to which they formerly belonged. And for the same Reason it might very properly be alledged by my Lord of Bangor, as one Evidence among others, of Mr. Pillionere's Conversion from Popery.

But

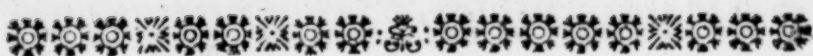
But if the Doctor shall infer from hence, as he seems to intend, that the Case is the same in Protestant Communions, he must be egregiously mistaken. There is no parallel: A Papist cannot communicate with any Protestant Church, upon the known Principles of his Church, without gross Equivocation and mental Reservation; therefore neither can a Protestant communicate with more Protestant Churches than one, when it is his avowed Principle that he may do so, and ought to do so. Indeed such a Conclusion can have no other foundation than this, that the Church of England, as well as the Church of Rome, damns all other Communions but her own; which God forbid should be true! I therefore add,

3. THAT communicating with the Church of England, can upon no just Reason be understood as an Evidence, that a Man is so far a Member of that Church, or so adheres to that, as to be thereby excluded from having Communion also with any other Church, which professes the same common Christianity, tho' it may differ from that in many particulars of less Importance. Here the stress of the Reverend Dean's Argument must lie, that Men are not suppos'd to be of one Church and to communicate with another. i. e. they are supposed while they communicate (for Instance) with the Church of England;

England; to be obliged not to communicate in the Churches of Protestant Dissenters. 'Tis astonishing to me that the Dean should think this Principle needs no Proof; or if he thinks it needs any, that he should omit to produce it. There is nothing of this Nature intimated either in the Corporation or Test-Acts; but only that Persons admitted to Offices should receive the Sacrament after the Church-Usage; i. e. Papists must become Protestants, and Protestants must be so far well-affected to the Church of England, as to own her for a Christian Church, before they can be capable of Offices. Nor is there any Thing in the Nature of sacramental Communion, to intimate any such peculiar Attachment to the Church of England, as should debar us from Communion with every body else. The Design of it on the contrary, as it is describ'd in the New Testament, is, next to our Remembrance of CHRIST'S Death, to signify our Communion with his whole Body or Church.

BUT I will detain the Reader no longer from the following Discourse, which I hope will make the Principles of an Occasional Conformist to appear truly Christian and Catholick, and not justly liable either to the severe Imputations of the Reverend Dean, or the loud Cry which has been against it.

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POSTSCRIPT.

AS the foregoing Remarks came out of the Press, I met with the Dean's Second Edition, corrected: And finding at the End of his Preface, instead of his Bookseller's Catalogue of the Dean's Works, an Advertisement, wherein he says, He had made, in this Second Edition, some few Alterations, which were not intended to alter the Sense, but to express it more clearly: I had the Curiosity to turn over that Part of his Book, wherein I am concern'd in the foregoing Argument, to see what Alterations might be made there, upon his second Thoughts; And could not help observing the Change in this Sentence, p. 18. "The Act of
 " the Occasional Conformist in receiving, &c.
 " came up to the Letter of the Law; and yet
 " was no Proof of what they [the Legislators]
 " required." So it stands in the first Edition: But in the second, instead of requir'd, it is expected. The Alteration is, indeed, but in a single Word: But that seems of Importance in the Argument; and to intimate, That as the Doctor owns himself in his Postscript, to have received Conviction, that he was in the Wrong,

xvi POSTSCRIPT.

in the Account he had given of King WILLIAM's Inclination about the Test in relation to Protestant Dissenters, from a Friend in the Country; so he had receiv'd a Hint from some other Friend, that he was equally mistaken, when he asserted, That the Legislature [in the Corporation and Test-Acts] requir'd constant Communion with the Church of England. It is now dwindled into this, That they expected it. I suppose, this depends upon Secret History; when the Reverend Dean produces that, we shall be able to judge of it. In the mean Time, I shall take leave to think, That they neither requir'd nor expected it, as the Term of Offices.



T H E



THE PRINCIPLES, &c.



MOST Men have interested Themselves of late, one Way or other, in the Controversy about *Occasional Conformity*; and They have pass'd their Judgments very differently upon it. Some there are, who undertake to justify it, as a commendable and useful Practice: Others condemn the Practice, and think it unjustifiable in itself; though they do not immediately conclude, that all who use it, are for that Reason, such bad and dangerous Men, that they are in Prudence to be chain'd up, and not allow'd to serve the GOVERNMENT, lest they should ruin the Church. But the common Cry has been loud against it, as a Practice inconsistent with itself, scandalous to Religion, and of manifest Danger to the Church.

It is no great Wonder, That what usually happens in Questions grown up into Party-Disputes, should happen in this Case, that artful

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Men should cloud them with Misrepresentations : They know how afterwards to improve them, as the Foundation of the strongest Prejudices.

BUT if a Man would judge truly of this, or any Case of like Nature, he must first clear it from all Misrepresentations : He otherways does not give his Judgment on the Question in Debate, but on another artfully shuffled into the Room of it.

I SHALL therefore endeavour to lay this Question before my Reader in such a Light, that by a fair View of what concerns the real Merit of the Cause, he may be able to examine it impartially, and pass a sure Judgment upon it.

IT will be necessary for this Purpose, to consider the Opinion and Practice of Occasional Conformity historically ; for as much as one of the common Prejudices against it, is a Supposition, That it is a Practice lately taken up, a new Invention to evade the *Test-Act* ; and that the best of the Dissenters themselves do condemn it, and declare, they are scandalized at it. Now this being an Assertion of Facts, the Occasional Conformist judges it may be easily determined, Whether he ought to lie under the Scandal of such a Charge : And if it shall be found in Fact quite otherwise, whether he ought not for the future to be clear'd from it, and from all such Prejudices and Insinuations as are solely grounded upon it ? He thinks, he need not go far to set this Matter right. There is a Proof against that Supposition beyond Exception, in one of the celebrated *London Cases*. Dr. *Williams* (after Bishop of *Chichester*,) undertakes to shew the Lay Dissenters the Lawfulness of their

their Communion with the *Church of England*, from the Testimony of above an hundred eminent Nonconformists of several Persuasions; so that with him it was a Case plain beyond denial, That not only some Few, but many Nonconformists, and they not the most inconsiderable or least esteem'd among them, but eminent Nonconformists of several Persuasions, had openly avowed their Opinion as to the Lawfulness of Occasional-Communion with the *Church of England*. I shall, for the clearer understanding of their Judgment in this Case, transcribe some of their declared Opinions, in the Order that Reverend Person has placed them.

First; * HE shews what Opinion the most eminent and sober Nonconformists have had of the *Church of England*; That they own her to be a true Church. This he proves from the Judgment of an eminent Person, as he calls Mr. Bayley, who says of the old Nonconformists, "They did always plead against the Corruptions of the *Church of England*; but never against the Truth of her Being, or the Comfort of her Communion.. As much (*adds he*) is affirm'd of the present Nonconformists, by a grave and sober Person among them, (Mr. Corbet) † *The Presbyterians generally hold the Church of England to be a true Church, though defective in its Order and Discipline. The like (he adds) is also affirm'd, even by those of the Congregational Way. So the Brethren in their Apology: The unreasonable Power in Church Governors, did never work in any of us any other Thought, much less Opinion, but that the Ministry thereof (of the English Church)* " was

* Case of Lay-Communion, p. 4. 4^{to}. † Page 8.

“ *was a true Ministry.* And * *Dr. Tho. Goodwin*
 “ doth condemn it as an Error in those who
 “ hold particular Churches (those you call Pa-
 “ rish-Churches) to be no true Churches of
 “ CHRIST, and their Ministers to be no true
 “ Ministers; and upon that Ground forbear all
 “ Church-Communion with them. And Mr.
 “ *Tombs*, one of the Dissenters that deny In-
 “ fant Baptism; *It is no more against the Gospel*
 “ *to term the Believers of England, the Church*
 “ *of England, than it is to term the Believers*
 “ *throughout the World, the Catholick Church;*
 “ *nor is it more unfit for us to term ourselves Mem-*
 “ *bers of the Catholick Church; nor is there Need*
 “ *to shew any Institution of our Lord, more for the*
 “ *one than the other.*

“ Secondly, “ HE shews what Opinion the so-
 “ ber and eminent Nonconformists have of
 “ Communion with the *Church of England*; that
 “ they are not totally to separate from it. This,
 “ (*he observes*) follows from the former, and
 “ must be own'd by all them that hold she is a
 “ true Church. So say the Members of the
 “ Assembly of Divines, † To depart (*totally*)
 “ from true Churches, is not to hold Commu-
 “ nion with them as such, but rather by de-
 “ parting to declare them not to be such. The
 “ Errors of these Men, saith Mr. *Brightman*,
 “ || is full of Evil, who do in such a Manner
 “ make a Departure from this Church (*by total*
 “ *Separation*), as if CHRIST were quite banish'd
 “ from hence, and that there could be no Hope
 “ of Salvation to them that abide there; let
 “ these

* Ibid. pag. 9. † Page 12. || Page 13.

“ these Men consider, That CHRIST is here
 “ feasting with his Members ; will they be a-
 “ sham’d to sit at Meat there, where CHRIST
 “ is not asham’d to sit? * And the *Dissenting*
 “ *Brethren*, We have always profess’d, and
 “ that in those Times when the Churches of
 “ *England* were the most either actually over-
 “ spread with Defilements, or in the greatest
 “ Danger thereof, that we both did, and would
 “ hold Communion with them as the Church
 “ of CHRIST. This was the publick Sense of
 “ Many, who met a little after the Plague and
 “ and Fire, to consider, Whether their actual
 “ Forbearance to joyn with the Parish-Church-
 “ es in the Sacraments, might not tend to de-
 “ ceive Men, and make them believe, They
 “ took their Communion to be unlawful : For
 “ upon Reasons given in, They agreed such
 “ Communion to be lawful, and meet, when
 “ it would not do more Harm than Good.”

I MIGHT add to these Testimonies cited by
 the Bishop, the known Practice of Dr. *Bates*,
 Mr. *Baxter*, and several others, Men of great
 Eminency among the Dissenters. And as the
 Lords observ’d to the Commons at a Confe-
 rence, “ || The Party of all the Dissenters that
 “ come nearest to the Church, and of whom
 “ the greatest Numbers have come over to it,
 “ were those that pleaded for it.” They there-
 fore justly said, “ They must acquaint the
 “ Commons, That it is no new Practice in-
 “ vented to evade a Law ; but it has been long
 “ the Principle and Practice of some of the
 “ most

* Ibid. pag. 14. † Page 15, 16. || Free Conference
 between the Two Houses, Jan. 16. 1703.

“ most eminent among the Dissenters.” It does indeed appear to have been the Opinion of the most eminent private Men among the old *Puritans*, and Modern Nonconformists, and to be avow’d by the publick Voice of the Assembly of Divines and dissenting Brethren, and Nonconformist Ministers after the *Restoration*; that is, To have been the Opinion of many Dissenters of all Denominations, and at all Times. And though there have been some of the Dissenters, at the same time, that have never used it, and have own’d, That in their Judgment, all Communion with the *Church of England* was unlawful, or as the Lords express it, “ The fiercest
 “ of the Dissenters, who intended to keep
 “ up a Wall of Partition between Them and
 “ the Church, have oppos’d it much :” Yet it is notorious, beyond a Possibility of Denial, there were Many that did not separate with so much Dissatisfaction; but continu’d to declare in Principle and Practice, they did esteem the Church a true Church, and Communion with her as such lawful, and meet, on some Occasions. It seems therefore somewhat strange, That the Gentlemen, Managers for the Commons, should so far mistake a plain Fact, as to acquaint the Lords at the said Conference, “ That the Intent of the *Bill* to prevent *Occa-*
 “ *sional-Conformity*, was only to restrain a very
 “ scandalous Practice, which is a Reproach to
 “ Religion, gives Offence to all good Chri-
 “ stians, and to the best among the Dissenters
 “ themselves.” Could these Gentlemen, who were desirous to appear so zealously concern’d for the Church, be in good earnest, when they call them the best among the Dissenters, who
 did

did most fiercely separate from it, and upon
 such Principles, as must absolutely refuse all
 Communion with it. They said, indeed,
 " They were incapable of having any Design,
 " they were asham'd to own." But it seems
 plain, They had Reasons they did not think
 fit to mention, that these of all the Dissenters
 should stand first in their good Grace and Op-
 inion. It seems also very strange, they should
 add, " That the Parliament by the *Test-Act*,
 " thought they had secur'd our Establishment
 " both in Church and State; and that they
 " had provided a sufficient Barrier to defeat
 " and disappoint any Attempts against them,
 " by enacting, That all in Offices, should re-
 " ceive the Sacrament of the Lord's-Supper ac-
 " cording to the Rites and Usage of the *Church*
 " of *England*; and never imagin'd, a Set of
 " Men could at any time rise up, whose Con-
 " sciences were too tender to obey the Laws,
 " but hardned enough to break thro' any." As
 this was design'd for a Description of Occasion-
 al Conformists, of Men that thought them-
 selves at liberty to dissent from the Establish'd
 Church, and were yet ready upon Occasion to
 joyn in Communion with it: 'Tis unaccount-
 able, how Men of their Knowledge in the Af-
 fairs of the Nation, should fall into such a Mis-
 take: There was no need of a strong Imagina-
 tion, they might have satisfy'd themselves very
 easily, and have been certain, there was at the
 very Time the *Test-Act* pass'd, such a Set of
 Men in being; that is, there were many Occa-
 sional Conformists, and there had ever been
 many of the same Principles, since the Names
 B of

of *Puritans* and *Nonconformists* were known in the Kingdom.

UPON the Whole, This is so plain in Fact, that if for the future, the Practice of *Occasional-Conformity* shall be represented as scandalous, because 'tis suppos'd a new Invention to evade the *Test-Act*, and which gives Offence to all good Christians, and the best of the Dissenters; the Authors of it must bear to be told, It is not true in Fact, and can only be supported by a scandalous Falshood.

ANOTHER Misrepresentation of *Occasional-Conformity*, and popular Prejudice drawn from it, is to represent it as a plain Instance of self-Contradiction and Hypocrisy: That it is by turns for a Man to condemn himself and his own Actions; to declare his *Occasional Communion* Unlawful by his Dissent, and his Dissent unlawful by his *Occasional Communion*; and that he must therefore be a Hypocrite either in the one or the other.

BUT the *Occasional Conformist* hopes a little Consideration of his Case will serve to set aside this Prejudice against him, as well as the former. He thinks a bare View of the Principles he goes upon, will shew a very consistent Reason, why a Man may not always communicate with a Church, when yet he may think is meet to communicate with it some Times. For he Supports his Practice by these few plain Principles.

THAT every *Man* is to Worship God in that Way which he judges most agreeable to his Will.

THAT every *Man* in making that Judgment is free from the authoritative Determination of any other Persons, Civil or Ecclesiastical.

THAT

THAT *Private Persons, and Persons united in religious Societies or Churches, differing from each other in their Judgment, and by Consequence in the Use of several Modes of Worship; may yet be good Christians, and true Churches, and their Worship of God severally acceptable to God, though in some Respects differing from each Other.*

THAT *these differing Persons and Churches are to express their Charity, and that good Opinion they have of each other, as good Christians and true Churches, notwithstanding their Difference: And that this they are to do, among other Instances, by mutual Communion.*

Now if these plain Principles are true, which shall be examined afterwards, as they are very consistent with themselves, they do in all Respects justify his Practice: For his Practice is no more than this: He does stately Worship God among the Dissenters, and on Occasion with the *Church of England*. Now here are two Religious Societies, that both Worship the same God, and according to the same Rule the Bible; but with some Rites and Modes of Worship differing from each Other. In this Case he endeavours to judge which of these Ways is most agreeable to the Will of God. In making this Judgment, as he believes, he is not to be determined by Authority, and therefore is not oblig'd to choose and prefer the Way of the *Church of England*, merely because it is established by Law, to the Way of the Dissenters because that is not so established: But is to judge for himself, as Things shall appear to him upon due Examination. Well then, on Examination, he judges, that of the two, the Way of the Dissenters comes nearest to the

Rule of GOD's Word ; accordingly he chuses and prefers it, as his constant Way of Worshipping GOD: But at the same Time he allows the Worship of GOD to be acceptable to him in the *Church of England*, though not in all Respects so near the Rule of His Word, as with the Dissenters. He owns it to be a true Church, and the Members of it to be good Christians, notwithstanding they do in some Respects differ from him. This good Opinion of the *Church of England*, he is ready to testify publickly, and among other Instances by Communion with it on proper Occasions. Supposing, I say, these Principles to be true, they fully justify him in his Practice. But at present let the Supposal of their Truth be laid aside ; 'tis manifest, be they True or False, they are yet very consistent with themselves. If they are Erroneous, and he is mistaken in them, he may yet be a very Honest, and sincere Man in believing them, and in acting according to them. And the Occasional Conformist, desires it may be remark'd here, that if he should be Mistaken in One or Other of these Principles ; yet even an Error in them will have a favourable Plea for Excuse. He will certainly in his Case have the same Plea for Allowance and Toleration, that all other Men have in their Mistakes ; and considering the Nature of his Error, if it be One, he thinks there are some peculiar Circumstances that forbid a severe Censure of it.

FOR if he is mistaken, 'tis in a Question about Church Power, and the Observation of Rites and Modes of Worship: And every One, that understands any Thing of these Questions,

ons, must observe, they are often very Difficult to be determined. This appears from the almost Infinite Variety of Opinions about them: So that it will be no Wonder, if in Questions of such Difficulty, both honest and enquiring Men should be mistaken. In such Cases, he apprehends it very hard and unjust to charge Men with Self-Contradiction; much more with Hypocrisy. In truth, Hypocrisy is a Charge of so high a Nature, so very difficult, if not impossible to be known to any but a Man's self and his own Conscience; that there are very Few, if any Instances, wherein Men take upon themselves to charge others with it, but, besides the Guilt of Injustice to their Neighbours by rash Judgment, they are also farther guilty of invading a Province which God has reserv'd to himself as the Searcher of Hearts. Nor does Self-Contradiction immediately follow upon a suppos'd or real Contradiction between a Man's receiv'd Principles. He only contradicts himself, when he professes to retain Principles, that he himself knows and perceives are contradictory to each other: But who can ever be well assur'd of that, who has observ'd, that the greatest Part of the World, have in many Things such short Views, are so weak in their Judgments, and especially in Questions, where an Enquiry after Truth is laborious, and the Hazard of missing it at last is very great? Most especially in this Case, where the Principles themselves are very consistent; and if there is any Fault in them at all, it is that some or other of them are erroneous, not that they contradict each other?

BESIDES,

BESIDES, the Occasional Conformist judges some Favour is due to his Principles, though mistaken, because they have apparently a good Design; because they seem to proceed at least from a good Purpose of preserving entire Christian Liberty, and Christian Charity, and reconciling them to each other. This is certainly a very useful and good Intention, and must be of very great Service to the World, if any Way can be found out to effect it. It deserves therefore the same Treatment, that honest Intentions and good Designs should meet with from the World, when they cannot always accomplish what they propose.

UPON the same Grounds, he thinks, he has also a ready Answer to another common Misrepresentation and Prejudice: That *it is a scandalous Practice for a Man to conform occasionally, that is, for the Sake of Preferment. That when he cannot bring his Conscience to comply with the Laws, that require his constant Conformity, he can strain his Conscience to a Compliance when a Place of Profit and Advantage calls upon him for it.* As odious as this Charge may appear at first view, he thinks little more need to be said to it, than barely to ask them that lay this Charge against him, What it is they mean by it? He supposes, they cannot mean, that barely to receive the Communion on Occasion of Preferment is a scandalous Practice, and in itself odious: Because they must know, this will bring an Odium on a Law that requires it, and which they are too fond of, to represent as requiring and enjoyning an odious and scandalous Practice. For if only to take the Communion on Occasion of Preferment, or if they like the Expression

sion better, for the Sake of a Place ; is this scandalous Practice, they mean ; then every One that does so in Obedience to the *Test Act*, is actually guilty of it : That is, every *Church of England* Man himself, that is ever promoted to a Place of Profit or Trust.

OF all the Persons to whom the Character of Occasional Conformists may be given, it belongs to none so fully and properly as to them who never were at the Communion but when they are oblig'd to be so for a Place ; and were they not under that Necessity, would never receive it at all. These Men are stiled Dissenters, not from the particular Rites or Usages of this or the other Church, but from the *Sacraments of Christianity* themselves ; and therein from all the Christian Churches in the World. And the sole Reason even of their Occasional Communion, is Obedience to a Law that makes it convenient for their Civil Interests to conform to it. It must be a very Odd Way of reckoning, to Account such Persons constant Conformists, because they are in Communion with no other Church, but that Establish'd by Law ; when properly speaking they are not in Communion with that, and conform only to a legal Qualification for Civil Priviledges. It is somewhat strange that Men are to be accounted in Communion with a particular Church, only because they are properly in Communion with no Church at all.

If it is any Part of their real Meaning, that this is a scandalous Practice, I could help them to a Way how they might free the whole Church and Nation from that odious Practice for the future ; which I shall be ready to communicate

municate, if they shall be in good earnest to apply a Remedy to it.

BUT their true Meaning (if they have a Meaning) must I suppose be this; That it is a scandalous Practice in an Occasional Conformist to do that for the Sake of Preferment, which he judges unlawful to do without it, and which is inconsistent with his constant and avow'd Practice of Dissent. As this is the only Meaning it can have; it happens to be so far favourable to the Occasional Conformist, that it is wholly impertinent, and nothing to the Purpose. For this is not the Case of the Occasional Conformist. It appears to have been his avow'd Principle and Practice, to communicate occasionally with the *Church of England*, before ever Communion with the Church was made a legal Qualification. He justifies his Practice by Principles at least consistent with each other, and which will reconcile his Occasional Conformity with his stated Dissent. And therefore as far as concerns him, this mighty Out-cry comes to Nothing. In good earnest the Cry against it, is by far more scandalous than the Practice: For was the Interest of the Church, and the Reconciliation of the Dissenters to be sincerely consulted, we should hear, instead of it, the former Exhortations to them, to conform as far as they can, not to separate farther than they needs must, and to beware that they manage their Difference with the Church, without Passion and Resentment. Such were the Exhortations of former Times; and then the Want of Occasional Conformity was the Thing complain'd of. At present indeed a quite contrary Behaviour is become the
Modern

Modern Fashion. Which may probably let us into the Secret, how it comes to pass, that the warmest Dissenters are the best in the Opinion of these zealous Churchmen: That is, They of all the Dissenters, are least likely to stand in the Way of their own Ambition, and Intreaguening for Places and Powers; and they value this one Circumstance, which they hope may be serviceable to themselves, much more than any Respect the Dissenters have for the Church, or any good Opinion they retain of it.

HOWEVER, it may still be said, *Though the Practice of Occasional-Conformity should be freed from the Charge of Novelty, of Hypocrisy, and Self-Contradiction, and a scandalous Stretch of Conscience, for Profit and Preferment: It may yet deserve to be condemn'd as erroneous, as a Practice depending on such Principles as are of very dangerous Tendency, and should be carefully watch'd against, to preserve the Peace and Order of Church and State.* If it may be so, the Occasional Conformist desires that Justice however, not to be condemn'd by *may be's*. He thinks, he can justify the Truth of his Principles, and the Usefulness and good Tendency of his Practice, as well as the Honesty and good-Meaning of his Intentions. He does not refuse to joyn Issue on this Point, and have his Principles fairly examin'd by Reason, Scripture, and Apostolical Practice: However, saving to himself the Benefit and Advantage of his former Plea, and his just Claim of all Privileges due to honest and well-meaning Men, that are mistaken, if on Examination of his Principles, they shall yet be judged by any Persons false and erroneous.

HIS *first* Principle seems to him so plain and evident, that it needs no long or labour'd Proof. It will hardly admit of a Debate, *Whether a Man is to serve GOD in that Way, which is most agreeable to his Will?* 'Tis the Voice of natural Religion, That the highest Honour is due to GOD. That therefore Men are to worship HIM in the most perfect Manner they can, as such Worship of GOD, is certainly the most acceptable, and the most reasonable Service. To act otherwise in the Worship of GOD, is not to honour, but despise HIM, and rather to affront than worship HIM. But every Man does then deny the highest Honour to GOD, and refuse to worship HIM in the best Manner he can, who does not worship HIM in the Way he best approves of; for his Service of GOD must then want the Concurrence of his Heart and Mind, when he offers to GOD what he verily believes is not the best; which must therefore be, at least in Design and Intention, a Contempt of GOD. And now that GOD has been pleased expressly to reveal to the World, what Service HE requires of Men, and what Worship is most acceptable to Himself, He has taken Care to assure us of this Truth, That the principal and most necessary Part of all Worship, is the Concurrence of the Heart and Mind. For whatsoever may be doubtful as to this or the other particular Part or Mode of that Worship which is directed by his Revelation, this at least is very plain and certain, That no Part of Worship is, or can be well perform'd, where Faith and inward Sincerity are wanting. So that no Man can serve GOD acceptably, or worship Him honourably, or follow the most certain Rules of natural and
revealed

revealed Religion, who does not act from an upright Conscience, and sincere Belief that he is serving God in the best Manner he can, and the most agreeable to his Will. And 'tis remarkable, this Principle holds true, whatever be the Measure of his Judgment, and Rule of his Conscience, whether it be his own Examination of the Word of God, to learn for himself what is the Will of God, and what Worship, is most agreeable to it; or whether he thinks it more convenient that other Persons should judge for him, and he judges it fit for him to follow their Determinations: For finally his Conscience must be his own Judgment, and can be nothing else, let the Reasons which determine it, be what they will. Nay, supposing he should judge, that for the Sake of Peace and Order, and in Obedience to the Authority of the Church, he is to comply with what is appointed and settled in the Worship of God, when it may be, some Things so determin'd, are not in his private Opinion, most agreeable to the Word of God: Yet even in such a Case, he acts upon this Principle; for as much, as he then submits his private Opinion, for the Sake of Peace and Order, to the Authority of the Church, because he himself judges it is most agreeable to the Will of God he should do so; and because he himself judges when, and how far it is fit and reasonable for him to do so. All Worship of God, must then be with the Concurrence of a Man's Heart and Conscience, unless he can be suppos'd to serve God best, against his Conscience, or without any Conscience at all.

THE *second* Principle of the Occasional Conformist, has been more controverted, and is esteem'd much more liable to Exception; *That every Man in judging what is most agreeable to the Will of GOD is free from the authoritative Determination of any other Person, or Persons, Civil or Ecclesiastical.* But he thinks, he can fully justify it to any Man, that will fairly examine it, without Prejudice. Conscience, is most certainly private Judgment, and can be nothing else. The *Bible* is the Religion of a Protestant, which contains the whole of GOD's Will revealed to the Church. It is confess'd on all Hands among Protestants, That this *Bible* is to be put into every Man's Hand, and that it is the Duty of every Man to study it, and endeavour to understand it. It is not only a Permission, but a Command of Scripture itself, *To prove all Things; to search the Scriptures:* But it is not easy to imagine, why this should be a Duty, unless it was thereby intended Men should follow what they find upon Searching the Scriptures; and after having *proved all Things, should hold fast that which is good.* That is plainly, They are to act according to their Conscience, or private Judgment, which they have made upon a fair and serious Enquiry into the Meaning of GOD's Will revealed in the *Bible*, as the Rule of their Faith and Practice.

Now, as this is the allow'd Duty of every Man, a Method prescrib'd by the reveal'd Will of GOD for the Rule of Conscience; every authoritative Determination, contrary to such Judgment, is plainly inconsistent with it; and for that Reason, were there no other, is impossible. The very Supposition of such Authority, supposing the former Duty, is a Contradiction.

tion. It contains innumerable Absurdities. It might oblige a Man to Impossibilities ; to obey God and Man at the same time in Commands opposite and contradictory to each other ; and to believe himself in the Wrong, at the same time he must verily believe himself in the Right.

BESIDES, it wants little Proof, among Protestants at least, That all Men are fallible, and may be mistaken: 'Tis the publick Voice of the Church. " * General Councils, when " they be gathered together, may err, and " sometimes have erred ; even in Things pertaining to God : Wherefore Things ordained by them as necessary to Salvation, have " neither Strength nor Authority, unless it may " be declar'd that they are taken out of the " Holy Scriptures. " It will hence follow, as a learned Prelate observ'd in his *Exposition* on that Article, " That we reverence the Councils " (or their Determinations) for the Sake of the " Doctrine ; but do not believe the Doctrine " for the Sake of the Councils. " There appear'd too much of humane Frailty in some of their Proceedings, to allow us such an implicit Submission to them, as to believe Things only because they so decided them. In Effect, it is so allow'd, That in Matters of Faith, and Things necessary to Salvation, there is no such authoritative Determination lodg'd in any Persons.

AND the only Part of this Question that remains disputable, is, How far Things not absolutely commanded or forbidden in the Word of God, may be determin'd by some humane Authority, and made Parts of the Worship of
God,

GOD, with which all Persons are oblig'd to comply, whatever their private Opinions may be of the Reason or Fitness of such Determination. Now, as far as this concerns the present Case, and the Practice of *Occasional Conformity*, it may be resolv'd in very few Words. If a Man in searching the Scriptures does find, according to the best of his Judgment, That for humane Authority to impose Things neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture, and therefore in themselves Indifferent, as necessary Terms of Christian-Communion, is contrary to the Scripture Rules of Christian Liberty and Charity: If he shall judge, I say, that as they are made necessary Terms of Communion, a Compliance with them, is by Consequence made a necessary Term of Salvation, and that the Scriptures do not allow any Thing to be made a necessary Term of Salvation, but what they have themselves expressly made so: If a Man so judges, he cannot in Conscience comply with such Impositions; but must dissent from them. For in such a Case, he goes upon a Judgment which concerns the Meaning of the Word of GOD, and which no humane Determination can over-rule: Upon a Judgment, that however they are in themselves indifferent, and so not forbidden in Scripture; yet it is forbidden in Scripture to impose them as necessary Terms of Christian Communion. And in such a Case, he is as free from the Determinations of humane Authority, as he is in other Matters of Faith, and Things ordain'd as necessary to Salvation: In which Cases, the *Articles* of the Church expressly affirm, " Even
 " General Councils, have neither Strength nor
 " Authority,

“ Authority, unless it may be declar’d they are
 “ taken out of Holy Scripture. ” That is, they
 are not to be receiv’d on their Authority, but
 on the Authority of Scripture

THE Occasional Conformist hopes, he can
 shew his *third* Principle is equally true ; *That*
private Persons, and Persons united in religious So-
cieties or Churches differing from each other in their
Judgments, and by Consequence in their Use of se-
veral Modes of Worship, may yet be severally good
Christians, and true Churches, and their Service of
GOD acceptable to Him, though in some Respects dif-
ferent from each other. This, he thinks, does
 plainly follow from the constant Experience
 of all Mens Weakness and Imperfection, and
 how liable they are to Mistake and Error,
 notwithstanding the most honest and sincere
 Enquiry after Truth. He does not see, how it
 can be otherways in a State, where we see
 Things darkly, and know but in Part. He
 finds all Claims yet made to Infallibility, no
 better than bold and false Pretences : And it
 can be no great Wonder, that fallible Men
 should be mistaken.

FOR this Reason he concludes, it cannot be,
 that every Error or Mistake of private Persons
 or Churches, must be of such a malignant Na-
 ture, as to destroy their Christianity. If it were
 so, true Christianity and Salvation, would be
 nearly, if not absolutely impossible to every pri-
 vate Person, and to every Church, from the
 necessary and unavoidable Condition of this
 present Life Nor is this only the present State
 of Men and Churches. Errors in Principle, and
 Miscarriages in Practice, have been the Growth
 of every Age : Churches of the very first Anti-
 quity

quity were not privileg'd from this common Condition of Humanity : They are on Record Examples of it, when under the Care and Institution of inspired Governors, and the Apostles themselves. No Man can well doubt of this, who has ever remark'd the Errors and Miscarriages taken Notice of in Scripture, in the Churches of *Corinth*, *Galatia*, and especially the Seven Churches in *Asia* : And yet they are manifestly in the same Scriptures, that note their Errors and Miscarriages, suppos'd to be Saints, and the Churches of God. It is certain, that an absolute Uniformity in several Churches, is not necessary to their respective Acceptance with God : The Church has declar'd accordingly in her *Articles*, “ * It is not necessary, “ that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all “ Places one and utterly alike; for at all Times “ they have been diverse, and may be chang'd “ according to the Diversity of Countries and “ Mens Manners ; so that Nothing be ordain'd “ against God’s Word.” However then they differ from each other, and fall into some Mistakes themselves in Things of lesser Importance, they may yet be accepted of God wherein they agree, in the greater and more essential Parts of Christian Religion, a sincere Faith, a devout Worship, and true Holiness.

THE Occasional Conformist believes also, his *last* Principle will appear true upon a fair Examination ; *That these differing Persons and Churches, are to express their Charity, and that good Opinion they have of each other as good Christians, and true Churches, notwithstanding their Difference ; and thus they are to do, among other Instances of their*
Charity,

* Article XXXIV.

Charity, by mutual Communion. He supposes it will be easily allow'd him, he acts very safely and well, when he conforms his Judgment of Persons and Churches differing from him, to that Judgment which God Himself makes of them: And that as he is to esteem them good Christians, and true Churches, he is upon proper Occasions, to own that Judgment in his Practice. He heartily agrees to all that has been said in the Argument against Schism and Division, for the high and necessary Obligation of Brotherly-Love and Charity, " * Which so much serves to raise and purify the Nature of Men, and to make humane Society perfect, which raises a Man to the Likeness of God, and creates the tenderest Union and firmest Happiness possible among all the Societies of Men." He observes with them, That our SAVIOUR has so enlarg'd the Obligation to it, as to make it by the Extent he has given it, *a great and new Commandment*, by which all the World may know his Followers from the rest of Mankind. He certainly gathers with them upon all these Considerations, that the dissolving this Union, the dislocating this Body, and the doing any Thing that may extinguish the Love and Charity, by which Christians are to be made so happy themselves, and so useful to one another, and by which the Body of Christians grows much the firmer and stronger, and shines more in the World; that, I say, the doing this upon slight Grounds, must be a Sin of a very high Nature. Now, the Occasional Conformist cannot but think, a bare Difference in Judgment

D

ment

ment and Practice from him, where yet the Worship of GOD is acceptable to Him, is such a slight Ground, as will not justify the doing of any Thing that may extinguish the Love and Charity that ought to be among Christians. And though every Man is oblig'd to follow the Dictates of his own Conscience, and in so doing to serve GOD in the best Manner he can; he is yet to prevent, if he may, all that Alienation of Mind, those rash Censures, and unjust Judgments of each other, that do usually arise from wide and warm Divisions.

Now, upon these Considerations, he thinks, he may well express his good Opinion of Churches differing from his own, upon proper Occasions, by mutual Communion. For by that Act he does, more signally than by any other, declare his Approbation of that Church, with which he communicates, as a true Church, and the Worship of GOD us'd in it as acceptable to HIM; and does own it for one of those Churches, which together with others, make up the Catholick or Universal Church of CHRIST in the World. Whereas if on the contrary, he was to refuse Communion at all Times, and on every Occasion, with Churches differing from his own, it might amount to a Denial of every Church but his own: It might too justly seem appropriating true Christianity, and the true Worship of GOD, to himself and his own Party only, and with the *Donatists*, to unchristian all that did not see with his Eyes. Besides, that this must alienate the Minds of Men, and occasion rash and unchristian Censures of each other; it is absolutely contrary to his own Principles of Christian Liberty, on which

which he justifies his own dissent from other Churches. Is it his Duty to search the Scriptures as the Rule of Faith and Worship, and then to serve God according to his Conscience, or the best Judgment he can make of it: Is not the same equally the Duty and Privilege of other Persons and other Churches? So that in such Case to refuse Communion with them, because they have not in all Things the same Judgment with themselves, is in Effect to unchurch them for one of these Reasons, Either because they have not our Eyes, or because they use their own.

NOR does he any Ways herein renounce his own Conscience and Judgment, or even occasionally not serve God in the best Manner he can, (which he professes himself oblig'd always to do,) as some have very weakly imagin'd. For to communicate occasionally with other Churches, is in his Judgment and Conscience, a Means to preserve in the Universal Church that Brotherly-Love and Charity, which is the most perfect Bond of Christian Peace and Unity. And when any proper Occasion calls him thereto, he takes it to be a Duty of that great Use and high Obligation, that he does therein, and as far as his *Occasional-Conformity* tends thereto, serve God in a Way very acceptable to Him, and in that particular Instance, most agreeable to his Will.

BESIDES, he cannot perceive how without some such Practice as this, different Churches, of which the Catholick Church is compos'd, (for particular Churches are as so many distinct Members or Parts of the Catholick Church;

he does not perceive, I say, how they) can have Communion as one Body ; or how it is possible to answer that Article of the *Creed*, *The Communion of Saints*. What is it that he can do more to a ~~Society~~ of *Pagans* or *Mahometans*, than at all Times and on every Occasion, to refuse owning their Religion, or to joyn with them in any of their Acts of Worship? What Way has he left whereby to distinguish between the least erroneous, and the most corrupt of all, that call themselves by the Name of Christian Churches ; if his Behaviour must be the same and alike to all, and amount to an absolute Refusal of joyning with them on any Occasion whatsoever in the Worship of God, and unchurching them equally, by one rash Sentence upon them all?

THE Occasional Conformist observes farther, It has been the Judgment of most moderate Men in the Church, That it was both lawful, and a Duty for them to communicate with *Protestant* Churches Abroad, when upon Occasion they were in *France*, *Holland*, or *Germany* ; though it is most certain, those foreign Churches differ from the Church of *England* in many Things both in their Constitution, and in their Modes of Worship ; and very nearly in the same, and as many Things, as the Dissenters do. This was the avow'd Principle and Practice of a very Eminent Man *, and of the highest Station in the Church ; as he honestly acquainted the World, in an Argument on the *Occasional Bill*, and it is notorious, it had been so much the Practice of the *Church of England*, that

* B^p. Burnet's Speech at the Conference.

that it was formerly an usual Instruction to the *English Ambassadors* (in *France*), That they should keep a good Correspondence with the Religion, and frequently resort to the Divine-Service at *Charenton*, where they had a Pew kept for them *.

It is farther evident, That in the Primitive Church there was a like Practice, for the Members of one Church to communicate occasionally with other Churches, although differing in many Things from their own. This appears in many Instances, too numerous to be mention'd. But the communicatory Letters given by the Churches to their Members to recommend them on Occasion to the Communion of other Churches, are a sufficient Evidence that it was approv'd by the Church, as well as that it was the Practice of private Men. And *Irenæus*, in a Letter to Pope *Victor*, who was going to excommunicate the *Asian Churches* about a Difference in the Celebration of *Easter*, informs him, " † That it was not a new Difference
 " between the *Eastern* and *Western Churches*;
 " yet his Predecessors never thought of break-
 " ing mutual Communion about it: On the
 " contrary, *Anicetus* and *Polycarp* without con-
 " troverting their Opinion, communicated to-
 " gether, and agreed to preserve the Peace of
 " the Church by encouraging the mutual Com-
 " munion of them that differ'd in their Obser-
 " vation, and kept it both Ways." Indeed afterwards the *Donatists* arriv'd to that Arrogance, that they limited the Church to their own Party, and refus'd Communion with all others-

* *Ld. Clarendon. Vol. III. p. 444.*

† *Euseb. Hist. Eccl. lib. V. cap. xxiv.*

others. Wherefore, says the Learned Author of *the Critical History of the Apostles Creed* *,
 “ That such schismatical Notions and Practices,
 “ so destructive of Christian-Charity, and sub-
 “ versive of the Unity of the Catholick Church,
 “ might be repress’d and contradicted, it is
 “ most probable, that *the Communion of Saints*,
 “ was added in the *Creed*, as an Appendix to,
 “ or Explication of *the Holy Catholick Church*;
 “ by which it was intended to declare, That
 “ though there be several Particular Churches
 “ and Congregations throughout the Face of
 “ the Earth, yet that there ought to be a Com-
 “ munion and Correspondence between them,
 “ as far as is necessary, possible, and conveni-
 “ ent.” And for this Reason *Firmilian*, in a
 Letter to *Cyprian*, censures sharply Pope *Stephen*,
 that he should think of refusing the Communi-
 on of *Cyprian* and other Churches, and thereby
 break the Peace of the Church, because they
 differ’d then from the Church of *Rome*, in the
 Question about re-baptizing Hereticks †.

BUT the Occasional Conformist has Ground
 to believe he is encourag’d in his Practice, and
 directed to it by much higher Authority than
 the Example of the Church in later Ages, or in
 the primitive Times; even by no less an *Example*
 than that of the Apostles themselves. This Ar-
 gument has been long since copiously handled
 by an excellent Pen, with great Accuracy and
 Judgment, and with uncommon Clearness and
 Strength ||; which I heartily wish I could per-
 suade my Reader to consult for his full Satisfa-
 ction. However, it is a Point of such Conse-
 quence

* Page 352, 357. † Cypriani Epist. 75.
 Interest of *England* consider’d, &c.

quence in the present Question, that I shall briefly set before him what the Occasional Conformist can offer from Apostolical Example for the Encouragement of his Practice, and leave him then to judge, Whether he can condemn the Occasional Conformist, without involving in the same Sentence of Condemnation the great Apostles, *St. Peter* and *St. Paul*.

IF we look into the History of the Christian Church, as recorded in the Scriptures, we shall find, that the Churches in the Apostolical Times, were made up of two Sorts of Persons; some reform'd from the *Jewish* Institution; others converted from the Idolatry of the *Gentiles*. These two Sorts of Persons, I shall for the clearer understanding of this Argument, call by the Names of the *Jewish* Christians, and the *Gentile* Christians.

THE *Jewish* Christians and *Gentile* Christians had many Things in their respective Churches, very different from each other. For Instance, The *Jewish* Christians thought themselves still under an Obligation to retain in the Worship of God many Rites of the Ancient *Jewish* Church: Thus they us'd to go up to the Temple to Prayer, and at the usual Hours; agreeable to the Institution of *Moses*, they took on themselves the Vow of *Nazarites*, preserv'd still a great Respect for the Laws of Circumcision, distinction of Meats, and in a Word, warmly press'd an Observation of the Law of *Moses* together with the Doctrines of the Gospel. Indeed, at the Council of *Jerusalem*, they declar'd the *Gentile* Converts not oblig'd to such Observances; but it seems plain they did not even at that Distance of Time discharge themselves from the Observa-

Observation of them. This is plain from the Care of *St. Peter* not to offend them which came down from *St. James* *, which he fear'd to do by continuing his former Conversation with the *Gentiles*; and from the Advice *St. James* and the Elders gave *St. Paul* at *Jerusalem*, That *many Thousands of the Jews that believe, are yet zealous of the Law*; and against him in particular they had some Prejudice, * because they heard, he taught the *Jews* among the *Gentile Churches* to forsake *Moses*, and the Observati-
on of his Rites and Institutions.

ON the other Hand, the *Gentile Christians* receiv'd the same Doctrines, and Sacraments of Christianity with the *Jewish Christians*, but did not retain any of their own old Rites and Modes of Worship, nor yet did they receive the antient Rites and Customs of the *Jews*; in particular, all the Observances of the Law of *Moses*, for which the one was so zealous, were not of any Use or of any Esteem among the other. So that Nothing was enjoyn'd among them, but what the Christian Doctrines requir'd; nor was any Thing forbidden them, but what was destructive of Christianity. On these Accounts the Discipline and Modes of Worship in the Churches of the *Gentile Christians*, must needs in many Things be very different from what was in Use in the Churches of the *Jewish Christians*; and every One who considers what Difference must arise from hence between them, will see that, at least, it was as great as any that is now in being between the Protestant Churches. Hence we may take Notice
by

* Gal. ii. 12.

† Acts xxi. 21.

by the bye, That Uniformity, was not the Means of Union between the most primitive Churches; and there is therefore little Reason to hope, it will ever prove a successful Method in after-Times. But to proceed,

THE great Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul, were the principal Persons of these differing Churches: and therefore the One is call'd *the Apostle of the Circumcision*, and the Other *the Apostle of the Gentiles* *. Yet on Occasion we find, that St. Peter communicates with the *Gentile* Christians, and St. Paul with the *Jewish* Christians. At *Antioch* St. Peter eat with the *Gentiles*, and being a Jew, lived after the Manner of the *Gentiles*, and not as the Jews did †. That is, being a *Jewish* Christian himself, he yet conversed with the *Gentile* Christians at *Antioch*. and joyn'd in Worship with them; for Nothing less can be meant by those Expressions, than that St. Peter, on this Occasion, did lay aside his Observation of the *Jewish* Customs, in Conformity to the *Gentile* Christians of *Antioch*, who did not observe them: And his after-Behaviour upon the coming down of some Persons from St. James puts it out of Question; for fearing to offend them that were of the *Circumcision*, that is, some Members of the *Jewish* Christian Church, he withdrew, and separated himself from the *Gentile* Christians. And it may be observ'd, That though St. Paul finds something Blame-worthy in this Conduct, yet it was not his Occasional-Communion with the *Gentile* Christians; but his Refusal to con-

E tinue

* Gal. ii. 8.

† Ibid. 12, 14.

tinue it, fearing the Censure of the *Jewish* Christians.

ON the other Hand, *St. Paul*, though most zealous in Doctrine and Practice for the Liberty of the *Gentile* Churches, and therefore for the Manner of Worship us'd in them, without any *Jewish* Rites ; yet on Occasion, he has Communion with the *Jewish* Christians, and so far, as himself to comply with the Observation of many of the *Jewish* Laws and Rites. Thus he observ'd the Feast of *Pentecost*, * took upon himself the Vow of a *Nazarite*, and purify'd himself according to the Law in the Temple ; and caused *Timothy* to be *circumcised* at the same time he took him with him to deliver to the Churches of *Gentile* Christians the Decree that freed them from the Use of Circumcision.

THE Occasional Conformist observes farther on this Practice of *St. Paul*, that the Reason of it was the very same with that whereby he justifies his own Practice. It was to shew on the one Hand his Charity to the Churches of the *Jewish* Christians, and that he did not think the Rites they observ'd, absolutely sinful in themselves ; for then an Occasional-Compliance with them, had been sinful in him. But on the other Hand, to shew by his more constant Dissent from them, that he better approved the Usage of the *Gentile* Christians, who serv'd GOD without them ; and especially, that he could not agree they were necessary, or allow them to be impos'd as such, on the Churches of CHRIST : Therefore though
he

* Acts xxi. 26.

† Acts xvi. 3.

he circumcised *Timothy* at *Lystra*, he would not permit *Titus* to be circumcised at *Jerusalem*. And though he yielded to the Advice of *St. James* and the Elders, to observe some of the Jewish Rites, not under an Obligation to do so, but as a prudent Method to preserve Peace with a Church that was very zealous for them *: Yet when some would have persuaded the *Galatians* to an Observance of *Moses's* Law, as of necessary Obligation, he then forbids them to comply upon Pain of Damnation †. Upon the Whole of the Matter, The Occasional Conformist hopes he is justified in a Practice, whereby he judges of other Churches differing from him, as GOD Himself does; whereby he endeavours to preserve that Peace and Union that ought to be between all the Churches of CHRIST; and in which he is encourag'd by the Example of the *Church of England*, of the Primitive Church, and of the Apostles themselves. And he can never be persuaded, it is such a monstrous Absurdity as some would represent it, till he shall see a full Answer to these Reasons of his Practice; for what has as yet been reply'd to them, he can by no means allow for a sufficient Answer.

It has indeed been said, “ That every Christian is oblig'd to constant Communion with the Church establish'd, where he lives; and that Nothing but absolutely sinful Terms of Communion in that Church, can warrant the Use of any other Way of serving GOD; For the Church which is incorporated into
E 2 “ the

‡ Acts xxi.

† Gal. v.

“ the State, of which we are natural Subjects,
 “ if it be a true and sound Church, challenges
 “ our constant Communion and Obedience ;
 “ and therefore, though Churches at a Di-
 “ stance (that is, in different Civil Govern-
 “ ments or Ecclesiastical Districts) may be di-
 “ stinct Churches under their distinct Bishops,
 “ and yet in the same Communion (so that
 “ Men may on Occasion, communicate with
 “ both) yet distinct Churches in the same
 “ Place, can never be of the same Communi-
 “ on ; and therefore there can be no Occa-
 “ sional Communion between them.” This
 is the substance of Dr. Sherlock’s celebrated *Case*
of Communion, and his *Defence* of it ; and it de-
 serves a little Consideration ; because on these
 Principles, is rais’d the most clamorous and
 popular Noise of Self-Contradiction, namely,
That Occasional Communion, declares there are no
sinful Terms of Communion in the established Church ;
and a stated Separation declares there are. But
 however formidable this Objection may ap-
 pear to some at first View, the Occasional Con-
 formist, thinks he has many Things to offer,
 which are a full Answer to it.

HE observes in the *First* Place, this is a very
 doubtful and uncertain Notion : For it appears
 Men are very far from being agreed where
 to Place that Authority, which it is supposed
 obliges to constant Communion with the
 Church established where we live, and forbids
 the Use of any other Way of serving God.
 We have two very different and contrary
 Schemes among ourselves, and both defend-
 ed with great Eagerness and Warmth. The
 Low-Church place this Authority in the
 State,

State, they make it arise from the Sanction of the Legislature, Acts of Uniformity, &c. And this indeed seems the proper Authority of a Church as by Law established. But the High Church oppose this Authority as downright *Erastian*, as destructive of all Church Power, and of the Church it self. They ask, where this Authority lay hid for the first Ages of Christianity, till the Empire became Christian? And whether the Church was void of Authority obliging to Communion for Three Hundred Years together? They therefore assert, that it is inconsistent with the spiritual Nature of the Church, and its perpetual Independency on the Civil Magistrate, as well as that it was unknown to the purest Primitive Churches. The high Church therefore on their Part, place this Authority in the Church-Governors; and assert, that the Church never did, or could transfer the Authority to the Civil Magistrate; but the Church has remain'd at all Times entire and distinct from the Civil State, in the Exercise of all Powers properly Spiritual. They will not therefore allow Dr. *Sherlock*, a Church incorporated into the State, of which we are natural Subjects. Now this Scheme is opposed by the Low-Church on their Part, and condemn'd as directly contrary to the Rights of Princes, as including the Absurdity of establishing an Empire within an Empire, as contrary to the State of the Church when the Empire became Christian, and in particular contrary to the Constitution of the *Church of England*, and Supremacy of the Crown established by Law. This Difference, where to place the Authority that obliges every

ry Man only to communicate with the Church established where he lives, may justify a Man while he suspends his Judgment in a disputable Point, till these contrary Claims shall be better adjusted; till at least he shall be able to see, that if this Difference was composed, and they were well agreed where this Authority is to be lodged, it would after that amount to such Authority, as would make any other Way of serving God sinful, besides that which shall chance to be established where a Man lives.

FOR the Occasional Conformist observes in the next Place, that the whole Force of this Objection rests solely on the Authoritative Determination of the Church established where he is: But he has great Reason to question, whether Church-Authority, whatever it be, or where ever placed, is such as to oblige him solely to Communicate, with the Establish'd Church, if according to his Conscience he can Worship God in a Way nearer to the Rules of his Word, and Christ's Institution of his Church. He desires it may be remember'd, that one of the Principles on which he founds his Practice, is, That every Man, in judging what Way of serving God is most agreeable to his Will, is free from the authoritative Determination of any other Person or Persons, Civil or Ecclesiastical. The Reasons that justify this Principle, are already mention'd, and therefore no more needs to be said in this Place, than this; That till it can be prov'd that Church-Power, wherever it is placed, is of such absolute Authority, as to supersede the Liberty of private Judgment; this Ob-
jection,

jection concludes Nothing at all against the Practice of *Occasional-Conformity*.

THERE is one Consideration more of great Consequence to the present Purpose. The Usage of one or another Part of Worship with any Church, does by no means include in it a Conformity to that Church. As their Worship consists of several Parts, some of them may be in Themselves, as well as in Mens particular Opinions, less exceptionable then others. Some may be free of all Exception, when others are or may be thought liable to great Exception, and even to be sinful. Does a Man Conform to the *Thirty-nine* Articles, by subscribing *Thirty-six*; when subscribing but *Thirty-six* is a virtual Dissent from the other Three? Or if a Man can joyn with the Established Church in her daily Prayers, and in hearing a Sermon, does it thence follow that he conforms to the *Rubricks* or the Use of Godfathers and Godmothers, and the Sign of the Cross in Baptism? So may a Man joyn with the Church in the Office of Communion, and himself account it lawful to receive it Kneeling, who yet does not conform to, or in his Judgment allow, the *Rubrick* which refuses it to all who Scruple to receive it in that Posture. So that there is a manifest and plain Difference between the Usage of any *One Part* of Worship with a Church, and a *Conformity* to it.

It is further said, “ That if such Principles
 “ of Communion were allow’d, and such a
 “ Practice countenanc’d, it would destroy all
 “ Order and Uniformity, and introduce in-
 numerable

“numerable Schisms in the CHURCH of
“GOD.”

To this, the Occasional Conformist thinks he may reply in very few Words, That he cannot so understand the Necessity of Uniformity, as that the several Churches, which make up the Universal and Catholick CHURCH of CHRIST, must needs have but one uniform Way and Manner in all the Parts of Divine Worship: and that the Rites in Use among them, must needs be one and the same. He finds the Objectors themselves allow the contrary in many Cases; not only with Respect to Churches of distinct Jurisdictions, but even in the Rites of Worship in the Cathedral and Parochial Churches of *England*; as well as that it is the publick Voice of the Church in her *Articles*. Therefore the Unity of the Catholick CHURCH, whatever it does consist in, cannot consist in Uniformity. And for that plain Reason, a Want barely of Uniformity, without something else added to it, cannot be Schismatical.

ON the contrary, he thinks his Practice, the best Means to preserve the Union, Peace, and Christian Correspondence of Churches that differ in some Things from each other: And that therefore it is the best Remedy against such unchristian Animosities, and Alienation of Affection, which, when added to a Difference, make it truly Schismatical. He is persuaded, that if Men were to lay aside their Prejudices, and would fairly and calmly examine the direct Tendency, and probable Consequences of this Practice, they would be so far from loading it with such Charges,
that

that they would allow it to be serviceable in many Respects to the Interests of the Catholick CHURCH, of the Civil STATE, of the *Church of England* as by Law establish'd, and of the Dissenters themselves.

As to the Christian CHURCH in general, it would be of very great Service to promote a true Catholick Temper; that is, a Disposition to Love, Peace, and Union, notwithstanding some Difference in Judgment and Practice. This seems the only practicable Method to preserve Catholick Communion, and the Unity of the Catholick Church.

It has been observ'd already, That it cannot consist in Uniformity. It is so far from being necessary, that it does not seem possible, That all Societies of Christians should agree to one and the same Manner of Serving GOD in all Things: And yet they are to be united as one Body, Now, which Way can that be effected, but by allowing to each other their respective Differences, and yet still remaining knit and joyn'd together in the Bond and Union of Charity? But is that Bond of Perfection like to be long maintain'd, when every Difference in Practice between two or more Churches, must be so highly magnify'd, that they cannot occasionally joyn together in the Worship of the same GOD, or in the Acts of Religion, which they own were instituted by the same common SAVIOUR of them both?

There seems a farther Advantage to follow from hence to the CHURCH Christian; that it is a likely Means to prevent the Mis-

chiefs of Imposition. The Occasional Conformist thinks, That however loud the Outcries are against Separation, the CHURCH has really found as bad or worse Mischiefs from Imposition. Even Separation itself, has generally been the Consequence of Imposition: and then all the Mischiefs of Separation, be they never so many, never so great, are finally but some of the Mischiefs of that Imposition that caused it. How often has this one Circumstance of Imposition, first made a Difference, and then made it irreconcilable? 'Tis often not the Thing itself, but the Imposition of it, that is scrupled; and then not the Thing, but the Imposition, makes the Difference. And often the Thing itself is of so little Use or Service, that it might well be parted with for the Peace of the CHURCH: But it must not be parted with, least the Authority that enjoyn'd it be weaken'd, and Disobedience to that Authority be thereby encourag'd. And then again, not the Thing itself, but the Imposition of it, makes the Difference irreconcilable. Now the Occasional Conformist judges his Practice, an excellent Means to prevent all these Mischiefs: For as he worships GOD in the Way he judges most agreeable to His Will, and that without Regard to the authoritative Determination of any Person whatever: He in a great Measure makes Imposition needless; because what is impos'd, is to be re-examin'd by his own Judgment; which is to reduce it to what it ought to be, Counsel and Advice; and leaves it, at least as to himself, no longer an Imposition. Besides,

sides, as he yet maintains a good Correspondence, and on Occasion holds Communion with such as use those Rites of Worship which he does not use himself, he declares the Things wherein they differ from him. to be indifferent ; that therefore there is no Necessity so rigidly to require the Use of 'em, as to impose 'em; and by Consequence, whatever Liberty they take to follow their own Judgment in the Use of them, they are not wisely impos'd as Terms of Communion on others. He believes, if the Christian Church was for some time to see the good Effects which such a Practice would produce, it might attain to a fair Prospect of getting rid of the Mischiefs of Imposition and Separation too.

He observes farther, That his Practice in its natural Tendency, will likely be found very serviceable to the STATE. As Things have stood in the World for some Time, the STATE has been highly affected by the Differences of the Church: And no sooner has a Church-Party arose, but it has by a little Skill and Management of Designing Men been form'd into a State-Party: The sad Effects of which are too many, and too sensible not to be taken Notice of as a great Inconvenience. But were the Principles of Occasional Conformity allow'd, whatever remaining Differences there were in the Church, it would not be possible to form a State-Party out of them: For where there was equal Liberty and Protection, there would be equal Allegiance and Affection. It would then plainly appear, That the surest Way for the STATE never to be injur'd or disturbed with Ecclesiastical

tical Quarrels, would be to have no Concern in them itself; to leave Men free in a Practice that would put an End to most of them, and would manage such as remain in a christian and charitable Method; that would convince good Men on all Sides, That they differ not in Matters of such Consequence and Importance, that the STATE has any Need to be concern'd in it, or that it ought in any Respect to affect the Peace of it. How happy would it be for ourselves in particular, if by these Methods we could a little calm and allay the unnatural Passions, and unchristian Animosities of a miserable distracted and divided Nation.

THE Occasional Conformist also believes that his Practice deserves some Regard from the Service it will be likely to do to the *Church of England* as by Law Establish'd. He cannot but think it very hard, that his good Opinion of that Church would be charged upon him as a Crime, and by such as would be Thought most Zealous for its Honour and Interest. He cannot but Hope however, that many will think it of Service to the Church, that the Dissenters are kept in good Temper towards it. It has been often complain'd of, and, where the Facts suggested in such Complaints have been true, not without Reason, that some Persons in their Separation from the *Church of England*, have used very hard Expressions concerning it. It has been taken very Unkindly at their Hands, that they should Censure it as no true Church, a Church which is not fit to be owned in any of her Acts of Worship, but which is always to be avoided

avoided as corrupt and antichristian. If such a Treatment of the Church is justly complain'd of as an Injury to it. Shall it not be accounted a Service to the Church, to put to silence such injurious Reflections, and preserve in them that separate from it, a kindness, esteem, and Respect for it, and even on Occasion to countenance Communion with it as a Church of CHRIST? If ever the Differences between them, are to be compos'd, and an End put to the Separation, which some pretend so much to desire; which can any Man think will most conduce to it, to preserve among the Dissenters a good Temper of Minds towards the Church; or so far to alienate their Minds, as to make them believe the Corruptions of the Church are so very great, that they can never have Communion with it, but on Conditions absolutely sinful? And that to joyn with them in any Acts of Worship is at all Times unlawful? One would be tempted to think in so plain a Case, that they, who prefer a total to a moderate Separation, would also prefer a perpetual Separation, to a Reconciliation.

Finally, THE Occasional Conformist hopes his Practice may be of some useful Service, to the Dissenters themselves: He does not, cannot mean as a Party; 'tis very easy to foresee, what so often has been confirm'd by Experience, that many are like to be drawn off from the Dissenters as a Party by it; who from the Use of Occasional Conformity, may become constant Conformists. But the Use he hopes it may have is of another Nature, and of much greater Consequence, that is,

is, it may prevent their Separation from being Uncharitable, and thereby prevent to themselves the Danger of its being Schismatical. It is too often seen, that the Consequence of Differences too greatly magnified, and increased by mutual Passion and Resentment is this, that it brings both Sides in Danger of a Schismatical Temper. Many, who are in the Right as to the Question in Debate, may yet find out an unlucky Art of being in the Wrong by a passionate and uncharitable Management of it. And if the Dissenters are right in their Separation, it will be of great Service to them to be kept right in their whole Behaviour to them, from whom they separate, and to learn the Way, how, while they maintain fully their Christian Liberty, they may avoid the Danger of falling into the usual Extream of losing their own Temper, and of breaking through the high Obligation, and Important Rules of Christian Charity.

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